Ontario

news release/communiqué

Ministry of Health | Ministère de la Santé

86/nr-296

Contact: Rick Winston, Toronto
Communications and
Information Branch
Phone: (416) 965-5167

MINISTRY ENCOURAGES RESEARCH STUDIES
ON ENVIRONMENTAL HYPERSENSITIVITY

TORONTO, December 19 -- The Ministry of Health will encourage research proposals for studies on environmental hypersensitivity, a first step in understanding the nature of the disorder and developing effective treatment, Health Minister Murray Elston announced today.

Currently, little is known about the nature of the condition called environmental hypersensitivity, which is described as multiple sensitivities to a wide range of foods, chemicals and environmental substances.

"We are encouraging the research community to submit proposals for an epidemiological study on environmental hypersensitivity and for proposals for controlled studies to evaluate the effectiveness of current methods of treating the symptoms," Mr. Elston said. "Epidemiological studies would provide researchers with information to enable them to identify common factors and develop consistent tests or standards for diagnoses. This is the first step in finding a cause for the disorder and developing effective treatment."

An epidemiological study is one that examines the prevalence and spread of disease in a community to determine the links between causes of the illness and the resulting symptoms.

"There may be a debate as to the nature of the illness from which these people are suffering," Mr. Elston said. "But there is no doubt that they suffer disabilities. These studies may clarify the causes of their complaints and lead to more effective management."

The ministry hopes to receive the proposals in time for its annual spring research grants competition. The ministry awards approximately $5 million annually through research grants programs. Currently, projects on subjects ranging from Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) to hypertension control at the worksite are being supported through these programs.

More research was recommended by both the Ad Hoc Committee on Environmental Hypersensitivity, chaired by George W. Thomson, and the subsequent Advisory Panel which examined the Thomson report, convened by The Hospital for Sick Children and chaired by Dr. Barry Zimmerman.

Although clinical ecology is not a recognized field of practice, there are about 15 medical practitioners in the province who specialize in treating symptoms believed to be related to environmental sensitivity.